

CHAPTER VII

CHIEF WALKER

There is a delightful little valley in Payson Canyon known as *Walker's Flat*. It was so called by the Indians because Chief Walker, acknowledged chief of the Ute Indians (Bancroft's History) claimed it as a camping ground. The name of the flat was passed from Indian to white men in the 1850's and from these Mormon settlers to their descendants.

The flat is located midway between Utah Lake and camping grounds to the south in the Sanpete and Sevier valleys. The Indians had roved the area for many snows prior to the coming of the Mormons.

Walker's Flat was an ideal place for an encampment since deer, elk, rabbit and other wild game abounded in the pine and aspen of the mountains that completely surround the little valley. And fish could be taken from the stream that tumbled across the rocks, half hidden in scrub oak, deep in a ravine that circled to the east of the flat.

The flat, itself, would have provided ample space for 80 lodges, known to have been set up when the tribes of the Ute nation met for counsel or festivities.

Chief Walker, for whom the flat was named, was also called Walkara, Walkah, Wauk and Wahker, meaning yellow or brass.

His birthplace has been fairly accurately established as Timpanogos village on the Spanish Fork River called Pequi-nary-no-quint or Stinking Creek (The Contributor IX, P. 162, March 1888, Salt Lake City)

This can mean none other than the stream which flowed from sulphur springs, which are indeed "stinking," in Spanish Fork Canyon. Here a popular bathing resort, Castilla, was established about 1880 and operated at a profit until almost 1925. The springs are all that remain of the resort, but they can be seen by any traveler on Highway 89 between Spanish Fork and Thistle in Utah County.

Walker was one of seven brothers, all except one being remarkable for athletic proportion and all influential men of their tribe. Arapeen, Peteet-neet, San Pete (Sanpitch), Ammon and Tabinaw (Tabby) were to gain chieftainship for themselves in adulthood. Their father was by no means a great chief, but headed one of the obscure clans into

which the Ute nation was then hopelessly divided. He seemed to possess the same penchant for trouble that was characteristic of Walker, and was murdered by members of his own tribe while Walker was yet a youth.

Walker and his brother, Arapeen, carried their dead father about a mile south of Spanish Fork and buried him in Rock Canyon. Then they crawled into the village of the assassins and killed and scalped the four braves who led the murderous attack.

Walker now assumed command of his father's band, turned his back on the Ute nation, and went to live for two years with the Paiutes, far to the south and west of Utah Lake. He took with him his father's harem of wives and also his numerous progeny. But months later he led his people back to their native valleys and here began to gather around him the band that would ride with him in raids both north and south.



Chief Walker

Peter Gottfredson said in his *History of Indian Depredations in Utah*, p. 317-318, Salt Lake City, 1919) that "Wahker was one of the shrewdest of men. He was a natural man, read from nature's books. He was fond of liquor, but when in liquor you could not get him to make a trade.

"When he was about twenty-five years of age he had a vision in which he thought he died and went to heaven. The Lord told him he could not stay in heaven for there would come a race of white men who would be friendly and he must remain on earth and treat them kindly."

Walker did not entirely live up to this advice, but he was tempered by it when he dealt with the Mormons. And he somehow felt that the Mormons were the white men the "Big Hats" (Father Escalante) had spoken of. Many were the fireside stories he had heard concerning the long-robed men who said they would return to these mountains and teach the Indians of God.

In due time Walker, six foot tall with pointed nose and chin, became a man of wealth and stature, commandeering hundreds of horses and dealing with many slaves. He headed a band of riders who raided tribes of Indians with whom they were at war — the Shoshonies or Snakes on the north, the Piedades and Paiutes on the west. They took women and children or killed the parents and took the children, hauled them to the Navahoes at the Colorado or into Mexico and traded them for horses. A woman or a child, sought by the Mexicans or Spaniards for slaves, could be traded for a horse. Walker took the horses north and traded them for whiskey, gold, ammunition, guns or skins and pelts.

Sometimes he organized great raids upon the Mexican horses feeding on the Rancheros of Southern California. And he took pains to include the silvered and brocaded saddles which went with the animals.

Charles B. Hancock and his brother, George, who later settled in Payson, had contact with these Indians while in California completing their one-year enlistment with the Mormon Battalion.

They made the march across the plains and the mountains from the great Missouri with the army of the United States. In the war with Mexico, Brigham Young had promised them that "we'd have battles with wild beasts and Indians but no bullets would be fired at us." It had proved so. Charles Hancock wrote that they "arrived within sight of the great western sea on the 27th of January, 1847, and remained there until their enlistment expired July 6, 1847."

In a sketch of his life, Mr. Hancock said:

The Utah Indians who had been making raids in California, headed by their chief, Jim Walker, and his braves came and encamped at Los Angeles a few days while we were there. They made a successful raid, and their way out was by way of Cahoun or Cajon Pass, sixty miles from Los Angeles. It was only accessible for loose animals because of its steepness and narrow trail.

We guarded this pass for some three weeks thinking the Indians would come back for a new supply. I learned from a Spaniard that these Indians were in dread of all other tribes in the mountains and Mexico. Arizona and California and that their homes were far away in the mountains where there was big water, much fish, and a big water of salt and a little water of salt. And that they were a roving tribe, plundering where they went. And the Californians had offered a thousand dollars for their chief's scalp.

Hancock said, "These Indians were Utahs, their headquarters and council grounds is now called Payson, Utah."

Walker made his power a kind of terrorism, not hesitating to take the life of anyone for even a trivial offense, says Eleanor Lawrence in *Touring Topics*, (May, 1932, p. 18). The Paiutes, she said, universally detested him and all agreed that he deserved death, but none could be found courageous enough to attempt its accomplishment. And the warriors he rode with were as young reckless and devoid of fear as their chieftain.

To the Californios who reckoned with his incursions on their ranchos, he became known as the greatest horse-thief in history. To the Mexicans he was the foremost trafficker in Indian slaves. To the mountain men and trappers he was one chief to count as an ally rather than foe, and to the Mormons who settled in the valleys of his birthright, he was a generous friend and a bitter enemy.

He had allowed the "Mormonees" to settle on his land. They could have the land, there was much of it. But they took command of the streams wherein were the fish that he and his people needed for food, and the beaver whose hides could be bartered to the white traders for wanted items. He had not counted on this.

They interfered with his slave-trade and said it was wrong to deal in human flesh. And they showed him The Book of Mormon that told of the great white god and of ancestors who were brothers to both the Indians and the white men.

For a time Walker listened to the preachings of the whites. He was "dipped" in the creek at Manti (See *Journal History* under date of Mar. 24, 1850) and baptized a member of the Mormon Church. He became an elder in the church along with Sowiette,

Arapeen and Unhoquitch, (*Journal History*, date June 9, 1851). He was a "good" Indian. But he had been stripped of the habits he had known all of his life. He stood in poverty. He had ceased his slave-trade. He had no horses with which to barter with the white traders. His people took to begging from the white men. Their habits grew slovenly.

Walkara saw the turn of events. He knew his people could not live as the white men lived. He waited and watched for an opportune time to turn the leaf.

Finally, in the early spring of 1853 an Indian was killed by a white man in a squabble over a trade of fish for flour at Springville. The Indians retaliated by killing a white man at Payson and like a flash of tinder the Walker War was on. The war lasted well over a year, the Indians fighting in surprise raids and attacks, killing the whites they found outside their forts, running off their stock and burning their mills. The war was concluded when Brigham Young rode into Walker's camp near Nephi and a treaty of peace was declared on May 23, 1854.

But Walker was finished. Within a year he became ill. There were pains in his chest, a numbness in his legs, and a feeling of great weariness and sadness in his mind. They were wintering at Parowan, when suddenly on December 26th he ordered a return to the valley of San Pete. In his mind had come the dark whisper he was going to die. Not waiting for the warm spring that was ahead, they packed and started out, traveled a few miles and then stopped at Meadow Creek.

Here they were met by Davis Lewis, a Mormon, with a letter and some presents from Brigham Young. Lewis wrote President Young of the meeting:

I arrived at Fillmore on the 28th inst., and started next morning for Walker's lodge, and met the Utah's coming with Walker and supporting him on a horse. He held out his hand and shook hands and seemed very glad to see me. He asked if Brigham talked good. I told him that Brother Brigham talked very good. . . I showed him the letter you sent to him, and gave him all the articles you sent him. He seemed greatly pleased and wanted me to come next morning to Meadow Creek and read the letter to him. . . He died during the night, but his last words to his people were not to kill the Mormon's cattle, nor steal from them. He was in his senses, and greatly desired to live. He possessed a good spirit and shook hands twice with me. As I was starting for the Fort he pressed my hand, and said 'come and see me again tomorrow, for I wish to have a long talk with you, but I am too sick to talk now.' (Letter from David Lewis to Brigham Young. Quoted extenso in *Journal History* under date of Jan. 29, 1855)

Walker, in his last breaths, had demanded a burial in keeping with his greatness — with his two faithful wives, with representatives of those who were his friends, and plenty of horses and cattle.

And so after a night of ceremonial mourning he was buried high on the mountain side at a place overlooking Utah valleys he had loved. With him were buried his two squaws who would comfort him on his journey, food, rifles, bows and arrows, and Brigham's presents of the day before, and fifteen horses they had slaughtered. Also two live Piede children, a boy and girl, who were placed under pine limbs and rocks spaced so as air could keep the children alive during the time that Walkara was passing into the land of mystery.

"Three days after, as some Indians were riding by, the boy called out to them and asked to be let out. He said Wah-ker began to stink and he was hungry. They laughed at him and rode on." (Quoted largely from Paul Bailey, *Wakara, Hawk of the Mountains*, Los Angeles, Calif.: Westernlore Press)

Walkers' Flat became valuable to the pioneers, who grazed their livestock on the grass, sage and sunflowers that grew in abundance. Through mutual agreement, men who lived on the west side of Payson turned their stock into the south end of the flat, those living on the east side used the north end. The herders sometimes played baseball to pass the time, and some excellent players were developed there.

Charles Brewerton, who owned a home and store in Payson, built a cabin on the flat and in the 1880's claimed the land through the Homestead Act. He later sold out to Charles Depew. Depew, Riley Patten and Harvey Amos each homesteaded a quarter section or 120 acres of land.

In 1941 Depew sold his ranch and the ranch house near the creek to his daughter, Fay, and her husband, Marion Elmer. To preserve his water right, Elmer found it necessary to prove that others had watered stock in the creek before him. He located Joseph W. Bates, John Done and Fred Tanner who affirmed the existence of the cooperative pasture.

Since 1970 the Elmers have seen neighbors on the flat for the first time. Their married daughters, Kathryn and Sharon, and their son, Layne, have built homes nearby, and Dr. Robert Hogan has moved into a home located above the old road. This pioneer road skirted the west side of the flat and led high into the canyon. About 1928 it was moved to a more centrally located route on the flat.